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ABSTRACT

Motivation is the key to learning. It can overcome most physical, emotional, and cultural obstacles. But no one, as yet, has supplied the best approach because individuals differ. However, there are some things that all teachers can do to create a desire to read in their students. They are: (1) know the students and be concerned about them; (2) provide a stimulating environment; (3) recognize the "success" factor; (4) provide different ways of reporting on books; (5) use multi-media; (6) use peer influence; (7) individualize instruction where possible; and (8) be well-informed. (SR)

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MOTIVATION AS CREATING THE DESIRE TO READ

How often have we, as teachers, heard or expressed the following feelings of frustration as we tried to help our students: "I know she has the intelligence, but she just won't make the effort," or "If I could only get him to pick up a book," or "There must be someway that I can reach that class." What these teachers are looking for can be summarized in one word - motivation. It is the key to learning. It can overcome poor environment or ineffective teaching. If we, as teachers, could only have ten or twenty guaranteed techniques for motivating children, we could wipe out 90 percent of the remedial reading classes in our country. However, there are no guarantees. But experience tells us that some things work better than others. In any discussion of motivation, the importance of the home environment as a motivational force should be recognized and emphasized. However, the purpose of this article is to concentrate on the teacher's role in creating the desire to read.

What can the teacher do? Here are some suggestions:

1. Be concerned about your students. When you are interested in their activities (social and academic) and provide guidance, pupils respond. No matter how cynical or recalcitrant, pupils know when someone goes out of his/her way to help. Suggestions about books and recreational reading made by a concerned teacher are usually listened to and acted upon. As the writer likes to remind his graduate students, "Very few of us are creative or gifted enough to make lasting contributions to our society, but all of us can make that extra effort to help another individual."

2. Provide a stimulating environment. This applies not only to the appearance of the classroom, but to the teaching-learning environment as well. A classroom where the exchange of ideas and the use of language are considered exciting and stimulating can lead to many reading activities. An attractive room with charts, posters, bulletin boards, interest centers, and a growing library of the best in children's books can stimulate interest in reading.

3. Recognize the "success" factor. Almost three decades ago, the well-known psychologist Abraham Maslow designed a hierarchy of needs, from the most basic physiological needs to higher levels of self-concept.[1] Toward the upper end of the scale were "esteem" needs. Children want recognition for their achievements. Their accomplishments should be praised. Some teachers find the "reward" system a good motivational technique. The "rewards" may be in the form of written or verbal commendations, books, certificates, tickets to movies or ball games, food, blue ribbons, inscribed T-shirts, or whatever ingenious ideas for prizes come to mind. The main thing is that praise, in whatever form, is a valuable motivational technique.

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4. Provide different ways of reporting on books. Did you ever watch the expression of a seven year old as he/she paraded in front of the class dressed as a favorite storybook character? Or the face of a sixteen year old as he/she worked on the set design of a play based on a favorite novel? They are motivated and reporting on books. Reports are not limited to written or oral summaries. They can be in the form of art activities, creative dramatics, music and rhythmic activities, and a variety of games. The only limits to these activities are in the imaginations of teachers and children. For a most complete and creative listing of ways of reporting on books, see Chapter 13, of Children's Literature in the Elementary School, Fourth Edition by Huck, Hepler, and Hickman.[2]

5. Make more use of multi-media. Some youngsters are turned-off by books. For too long, books have been symbols of reading failure. Another approach is needed. So we try cassettes, records, films, filmstrips, TV. We make more use of newspapers, magazines, photographs, and cartoons. Some teachers put inexpensive cameras in the hands of their students and ask them to supply captions or descriptions for their photographs. Other teachers encourage the use of tape recorders and ask their students to interview well-known or unusual persons in the community. Other pupils may be involved in video taping or film making. The objective is to find the motivational technique that will encourage the student to use and develop language skills.

6. Make use of peer influence. Not all children are convinced that teacher knows best, but many are impressed by the opinions and viewpoints of their peers. So when one student recommends a short story and another is lavish in his/her praise of an autobiography, their classmates listen. The lesson to be learned from peer influence is that when we motivate one student, we are, in some cases, influencing others.

7. Where possible, individualize instruction. If you are to know your students, be aware of their interests, and set realistic goals, you must plan your program so there is time for one-to-one instruction. Most children (and adults) respond to a classroom environment in which the learner feels free to express ideas without competing with others, and proceed at a pace that fits one's learning style. Individualized instruction provides more opportunity for a teacher to listen to a child, learn more about his/her interests, and to provide a better program of instructional and recreational reading.

8. Be well-informed. If teachers are to recommend books, they must know books that will appeal to children. We don't expect teachers to have all the answers (or even most of them), but we do expect teachers to be readers, increasingly interested in the events (political, cultural, recreational, economic, etc.) that surround them. The informed teacher can respond to pupil's questions, supplying the needed information or recommending a key book or article when answers are sought after. The informed teacher, through discussion and questioning, helps build up a background of experience that aids comprehension and makes reading more pleasurable.

To summarize: Motivation is the key to learning. It can overcome most physical, emotional, and cultural obstacles. But no one, as yet, has supplied the best approach because individuals differ. However, there are

some things that all teachers can do. They are: (1) know your students and be concerned about them; (2) provide a stimulating environment; (3) recognize the "success" factor; (4) provide different ways of reporting on books; (5) use multi-media; (6) use peer influence; (7) individualize instruction where possible; and (8) be well-informed.

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